

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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President Obama Says Egypt Is “Not Going Back”

By MacKenzie C. Babb
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama says that after nearly two weeks of political unrest in Egypt, the country “is not going to go back to what it was.”

“The Egyptian people want freedom. They want free and fair elections. They want a representative government. They want a responsive government,” Obama said in a Fox News interview February 6.

On February 5 the president discussed Egypt by telephone with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed of the United Arab Emirates, British Prime Minister David Cameron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel. A White House statement about the calls said Obama expressed concern about continued raids on Egyptian civil society and called for the release of all journalists, human rights advocates and activists detained without cause.

He also emphasized “the importance of an orderly, peaceful transition, beginning now, to a government that is responsive to the aspirations of the Egyptian people,” adding this should include “credible, inclusive negotiations between the government and the opposition,” the statement said.

The leaders agreed to stay in close contact.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton called for political reform in Egypt to be an “inclusive process” during a special briefing February 6. She commended the transition so far for reaching out to “a lot of the opposition and civil society leaders.”

She said this is “a very important moment in Egyptian history, and it holds great promise.”

State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley said in a news briefing February 7 that the Egyptian people “need to test the seriousness of the government and others that they will participate in a peaceful, democratic process.”

“There’s a great opportunity here for the Egyptian people to have a greater say in who will lead their country in the future. They need to seize this opportunity. They need to join this transition process,” he said.

Crowley added that “the sooner this can happen, the better.”

Vice President Biden spoke by telephone with Egyptian Vice President Omar Suleiman February 5. According to a

White House statement about the call, Biden “stressed the need for a concrete reform agenda, a clear timeline and immediate steps that demonstrate to the public and the opposition that the Egyptian government is committed to reform.”

President Obama Calls on Business to Help Boost U.S. Competitiveness

By Andrzej Zwanecki
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama called on U.S. companies to help boost U.S. economic growth and job creation as his government works to make the United States “the best place on earth to do business.”

The president struck a conciliatory note in a February 7 speech to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the largest U.S. business lobbying group, intended to improve relations with the U.S. business community. Those relations were stormy at times as his administration worked to save the world from a financial meltdown and soften the impact of the economic recession.

The relations improved recently when the president opted to support a tax measure favored by business and named the business-savvy former banker William Daley as his new chief of staff and the chief executive of General Electric Company, Jeffrey Immelt, as his business adviser.

Obama said increased global competition for investment and jobs has put pressure on U.S. corporations to move their manufacturing and research facilities to developing markets where costs and taxes are lower. “These forces are as unstoppable as they are powerful,” the president said.

Yet, he said, the U.S. economy continues to be the largest and most vibrant, its workers the most productive and its universities the best in the world. Building on these advantages, the president said, U.S. businesses, working together with the government, can make the economy more competitive.

Obama outlined four areas ripe for improvement: education, infrastructure, corporate taxes and trade. The president said he already has proposed a number of initiatives aimed at boosting innovation and improving the business climate, including a review of regulations, reorganization of trade-related agencies and various tax incentives. Those initiatives, he said, are intended to provide businesses with educated workers with the right skills, incentives to innovate and modern infrastructure to base their activities on.

Obama also offered to be “a booster” for American businesses, American workers and American products on

the world scene.

But he said the more friendly business climate his administration wants to create should make U.S. corporations more willing to invest in the United States rather than in other economies.

"The end result ... cannot simply be that new breakthroughs and technologies are discovered in America but manufactured overseas," he said.

When the president announced some of his business initiatives in his January State of the Union speech, the Business Roundtable, a group of chief executives of major U.S. corporations, said it was heartened by his focus on American competitiveness.

U.S. Intends to Recognize Independent South Sudanese State

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — With the announcement that an overwhelming majority of southern Sudanese have voted to establish an independent state, the Obama administration says it intends to recognize the new country in July and is also beginning the process of withdrawing Sudan from its list of state sponsors of terrorism.

"After decades of conflict, the images of millions of southern Sudanese voters deciding their own future was an inspiration to the world and another step forward in Africa's long journey toward justice and democracy," President Obama said in a February 7 statement.

The final results of the January 9-15 referendum were announced February 7, revealing that more than 98 percent of southern voters had chosen to secede from Sudan.

Obama congratulated the people of southern Sudan and said he is "pleased to announce the intention of the United States to formally recognize Southern Sudan as a sovereign, independent state in July 2011."

All parties need to "ensure that this historic moment of promise becomes a moment of lasting progress," Obama said. The president called for the full implementation of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and said all outstanding disputes need to be resolved peacefully.

"At the same time, there must be an end to attacks on civilians in Darfur and a definitive end to that conflict," Obama said.

"The United States will continue to support the aspirations of all Sudanese ... [and] will work with the governments of Sudan and Southern Sudan to ensure a smooth and peaceful transition to independence," he said.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton commended the Sudanese government in Khartoum for accepting the outcome of the referendum.

She announced that the United States "is initiating the process of withdrawing Sudan's State Sponsor of Terrorism designation, the first step of which is initiating a review of that designation."

Sudan has been listed as a state sponsor of terrorism since 1993 due to its links with international terrorist organizations. Terrorist leaders including Carlos the Jackal, Osama bin Laden and Abu Nidal resided in Khartoum during the 1980s and 1990s. The designation has prohibited Sudan from buying or receiving U.S. armaments and from receiving any U.S. economic assistance, in addition to other restrictions.

"Removal of the State Sponsor of Terrorism designation will take place if and when Sudan meets all criteria spelled out in U.S. law, including not supporting international terrorism for the preceding six months and providing assurance it will not support such acts in the future, and fully implements the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, including reaching a political solution on Abyei and key post-referendum arrangements," Clinton said.

State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley said February 7 that Sudan has indicated it wants to have more normal relations with the United States and the state-sponsor designation is an issue that stands between Khartoum and Washington.

"We've indicated that, going forward, we are willing to work to resolve this, with the caveat ... that there are particular legal requirements that have to be satisfied before this action could be taken," Crowley said.

Solar Panels Versus Trees

By Karin Rives
Staff Writer

Washington — Americans love their trees. As a growing number of homeowners in leafy neighborhoods install solar panels, however, an awkward debate has emerged.

What is more important for the environment and for humans in the long run: clean energy or trees?

As the United States continues to develop renewable power sources and encourage homeowners to take

advantage of solar and wind power tax credits, clean energy advocates increasingly run into opposition from environmental groups with other priorities. It can force communities to make tough choices.

In the Washington suburb of Takoma Park, Maryland, city leaders told a homeowner that a tall silver maple tree that would shade the solar panels he planned to install was protected by the city's strict tree-protection rules. Because the tree trunk measured more than 24 inches (60 centimeters) it was part of the city's coveted "urban forest," which covers more than half the town.

In Sunnyvale, California, the solar panels won out. A couple in that community took its dispute all the way to federal court, but they were told they had to chop down two trees that shaded their neighbor's solar panels.

Under California's Solar Shade Control Act, homeowners cannot let trees in their yard shade more than 10 percent of a neighbor's solar panels between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., when sunshine is most intense.

A homeowner in Winter Springs, Florida, spent \$26,000 on her solar panels, crossing her fingers that the city would let her cut down a number of trees that blocked her investment. The city did, but only if she planted new trees where the old ones had stood or paid \$250 per tree to have it planted somewhere else.

"We were trying to do what's right for the environment," the surprised homeowner told a local television station. "We thought everybody would give us the thumbs-up for it."

Such debates are mirrored in other parts of the world. In Sweden, for example, groups have protested against construction of large wind-power turbines in what they say are environmentally sensitive areas. In Brazil and some other Latin American countries, hydroelectric projects sparked opposition from people who say the damming of water threatens sensitive ecosystems and native communities.

PROS AND CONS

When weighing trees against solar panels, the decision may depend on where you live, said Pieter Stroeve, a professor at the University of California-Davis and co-director of the California Solar Energy Collaborative.

"In states where there is less sunlight, [sacrificing trees] may not make sense because the return on saving energy from not burning [fossil fuels] may be too small," he said. In the sunny Southwest, removing trees and replacing them with low trees that don't interfere with photovoltaic systems may make sense.

Another solar expert and colleague of Stroeve's, Jan Kleissl of the University of California-San Diego, said many people forget that when trees die and rot, they release the carbon that they once captured.

"Generally the public overrates the carbon dioxide impact of trees," said Kleissl, also a co-director of the California Solar Energy Collaborative. "Solar panels remove carbon for good by displacing fossil fuels. Solar panels are also 10 to 20 percent more efficient than a tree in removing carbon."

Removing a large tree for one solar panel would be a waste, but most people have a solar array that is equal to, or larger, than the tree, he said. "And then the solar panels always win."

TREES COOL HOMES, PREVENT RUNOFF

The Takoma Park homeowner, high school environmental science teacher Patrick Earle, had done the math. He told city leaders that it would take his silver maple tree 140 years to sequester the carbon dioxide emissions that his solar system offsets in one single year.

Half the electricity his household used to buy from a regional power company was generated by coal-burning plants, he said.

"Coal mining in my wife's home state of West Virginia has disastrous environmental and social consequences," Earle told city leaders during a recent debate about the city's tree rules. "Forests are leveled. Mountain tops are completely removed, leaving grotesque scars in the landscape. Rivers are polluted by sediment and acid drainage from mining. Lives are lost in mining accidents. We realized that through our dependency on coal, we were indirectly contributing to all these problems."

To Earle, it's a matter of environmental justice as much as reducing greenhouse gases.

"When we are so focused on protecting the trees in our backyards, we lose sight of the fact that in doing so we force other communities to bear the environmental costs of our energy production," he told America.gov.

The silver maple did come down in the end, but only after Earle agreed to plant 23 other trees throughout the city. He was able to whittle down that requirement to 15 trees after purchasing larger seedlings than originally planned.

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